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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that role playing can be effective in enabling students to explore human relations problems. The benefits of role play are outlined. Role playing models are demonstrated, and an exercise to develop skills and to explore feelings, attitudes, values, and problem-solving strategies is presented. Use of role play with a Year Ten Citizenship Education class in Victoria, Australia, is described, focusing on decision making in the family. Problem situations are enacted and discussed. The paper emphasizes that, in order for role play to be effective, a real-life "relevant" topic should be chosen, and the participants should be thoroughly prepared. The paper concludes that role play can be both empowering for the professional and a powerful teaching-learning strategy in the classroom. It offers students an opportunity to become actively involved in exploring issues and dilemmas and in acquiring skills. (JDD)

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ED 377 159

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

OF ROLE PLAYING

AS A MODEL OF TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper will argue that Role Playing can be effective in enabling students to explore human relations problems. Role Playing models will be demonstrated and exercises to develop skills to explore feelings, attitudes, values and problem-solving strategies will be outlined. Problem situations will be enacted and then discussed. An interactive approach will be adopted to illustrate that Role Play can be both empowering for the professional and a powerful teaching-learning strategy in the classroom.

Synopsis

Role playing enables students to explore human-relations problems by enacting problem situations and then discussing the enactments. Together, students can explore feelings, attitudes, values and problem-solving strategies. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 241). Fannie and George Shaftel's (1967) role playing model can very simply be described as a model which helps students to 'sample life', by dealing with everyday problems through action. Role playing can involve all of the class as either participants or observers in a real problem situation. It can help students work towards not only a resolution of the problem but also a greater understanding of the issues involved in the problem.

Role play can be used to:

1. explore feelings.
2. gain insights into attitudes, values and perceptions.
3. develop problem-solving skills and attitudes.
4. explore subject matter in varied ways.

(Joyce and Weil 1986: 242)

Introduction

In Shaftel's (1967) version of role play it is clear that the emotional release of participants in the role play and the analysis and discussion of the enactment are as important as the role play itself. Shaftel maintains that any activity that encourages students to express emotions is of enormous educational and personal benefit as it enables students to see how their feelings influence their behaviour.

Role Play

Role playing is based upon the assumption that participants will become involved in the role play in a group situation and usually before an audience of peers. Working together with peers on the resolution of a problem can help students to develop new ideas and approaches to a problem situation. The model de-emphasises the traditional role of the teacher and encourages listening and learning from one's peers. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 243). Many teenagers are either very confused about their ideas and beliefs or they mimic those of their parents or peers. This is especially true in relation to political, social and moral attitudes. Role play helps students to become more conscious of their <u>own</u> attitudes, values and belief systems. By raising issues students can begin to understand themselves and to clearly formulate their own personal values, attitudes an beliefs.

The concept of 'role' is one of the central theoretical underpinnings of the role play model. Students can gain a clearer understanding of others through observing the roles that others play. Students are forced to view the teacher enacting a role but very seldom have the opportunity of seeing their peers assume other roles. Through observation of others, students can gain a clearer understanding of themselves as well as others.

<u>Benefits of Role Play</u>

Teachers frequently use this model as it requires very little preparation and the use of minimal resources. A role play situation can develop spontaneously in the classroom as different issues are raised in textbooks, the media, novels or through discussion.

Role play enables all students to be actively involved in the lesson. Some will be assigned participatory roles whilst the remainder of the class will be required to function as observers. This involvement helps add interest and variety to classroom routine.

Often difficult theoretical concepts can be difficult to explain to a class of underachievers and quite often the role play strategy can express an idea more clearly and concisely to students then other expository methods.

Role play has achieved a position of prominence as a model because of its versatility. It can be applied to a variety of subjects and subject matter. Role play actively involves the class taking them out of the role of passive observers and into the role of active participants.

Illustration of Role Play Model

The Scenario

Overview of a lesson on Decision Making in the Family using the role Playing strategy.

Phase 1 - Explain the concept of role playing. Introduce the problem to be role played (a teenage boy trying to persuade his parents to allow him to leave school).

Phase 2 - Analyse roles of Mother, Father, Son, Daughter. Select students to act as role players.

Phase 3 - Explain the line of action and set the scene of the action.

Phase 4 - Assign observation tasks and decide what to look for.

Phase 5 - Begin, maintain and break role play.

Phase 6 - Discuss and evaluate.

Phase 7 - Re-enact. (as role plays are relatively brief 2 or 3 can be preformed in a lesson.)

Phase 8 - Discuss and evaluate.

Phase 9 - Share experiences and generalise.

The teaching of Year Ten Citizenship Education class (which consisted mainly of 15 year old boys) a unit entitled 'Power and Authority' comes to mind here as an illustration of the Role Play Model. One of the components of the unit was to examine how decisions are made within a family. We had examined the Victorian family and the authoritarian role of the father. We were presently discussing how the modern family varies from the Victorian family in terms of who has the power and authority and how decisions are made. In order to fully understand the process of decision making in a family context, I decided to introduce the class to the notion of 'role play'. Having discussed the concept of 'role' with the class I then explained the part played by role observers.

The class decided that a very real issue that could be the basis of the role play was a child trying to persuade his parents to allow him to leave school early in order to get a job. The class then discussed the type of role the characters in the family role play would assume.

The outcome was;

Dad was to be a good listener who wants to hear all the facts before making any decision.

Mum would be full of concern and anxiety about the future of her son.

Daughter fights with her brother, but generally supports him.

Son is quite intelligent but wants to leave school early in order to get a job.

The role play was centred around a scene in a typical family home, where the son is trying to persuade his parents to allow him to leave school. The roles were clearly defined and the players went through a series of enactments (3 in all).

At first the novelty of the role play situation rendered the actors mute. In the second attempt, one character (Mum) monopolised the decision making process. However, by the third attempt the four participants, with the help of feedback from the role observers, had sorted out their roles and interacted well together, this resulted in some very productive decision making.

I found that the content (family decision making), I was working on with year 10 Citizenship Education class was ideally suited to the role play strategy. The class was enthusiastic about trying something new, though not all were confident about acting in front of the class. I prepared the class by discussing the concept of 'role' and by reassuring students that no matter what they said in the role play it would be acceptable. I constantly reiterated that everyone's views, feelings and actions would be accepted without retribution. As this was the students' first attempt at this strategy I decided to select students who were comfortable with acting in front of the class.

The class was prepared for the role play by:

- Clearly discussing the nature of each character in the role play;
- describing the situation that they were to enact;
- assigning observation tasks to members of the class not participating in the actual play.

The role play was enacted three times, each time with feedback from the observers helping the actors to clarify their ideas and modify their skills of communication and interaction.

Script of Classroom Interaction

The following segment of the lesson shows the lead-up activities to the actual role play and the role play itself and displays phases of the model.

Phase 1 - Warm up of the group. The problem is restated and made explicit. The story for enactment is outlined.

Phase 2 - The roles are analysed and players selected.

Phase 3 - The line of action is set. The stage is set.

Phase 4 - Observation tasks are assigned.

Phase 5 - The role play begins, is maintained and is broken.

This section of the model was chosen for taping, as it is crucial for the students to understand exactly what is expected of them before putting them into the position of role play participants. If students are uncertain about the task they are to perform then inevitably the entire roleplay will be unsuccessful.

Script	Comments
Teacher Today we are going to look at a typical family trying to make an important decision. We are going to use role play to examine just how this family will be trying to make a decision about their son. The family must consider whether it is more beneficial for John to leave school before he gets his Junior certificate and start work or whether he should stay on at school and get his Junior. We have already discussed the characters and what they are like but I'll just go over this again to refresh everyone's memory. Remember we have mum who is bit of a worry wart. She is very concerned about her son's future. Dad is a quiet man who wants to think about all the facts before making a decision. Liz the daughter, who like all sisters teases her brother, but really only wants the best for him. John who wants to leave school early to get a job as an apprentice mechanic. How the family solves the problem and comes to a decision about John's future is up to the role players. What sort of things might they discuss in making their decision? Has anyone got any suggestions for what the family might discuss? Kerrie?	Getting students to identify with the issue.

Script	Comments
Teacher: He'll need his Junior certificate to get another job if he doesn't like the mechanic work. **Teacher:** Very good. So the Junior certificate will come in handy if he should leave the apprenticeship as a mechanic and he wants to become a carpenter or something like that. He'll need a Junior certificate. Any other things the family might have to discuss in trying to come to a decision? Michelle? **Student:** How much money the job pays. **Teacher:** Right, whether it is a job which pays good enough to support John. What other things might the family discuss? **Student:** The hours. **Teacher:** The hours he might work. Is it going to be a job where he has no leisure time and he has to spend from 7 o'clock to 6 o'clock at night in the mechanic shop? Anything else that the family might discuss? **Student:** Dirty fingernails. **Teacher:** And how might dirty fingernails affect the family's decision?	Students offer suggestions for the content of the role play. Teacher probing student thinking.

Script	Comments
Student: Germs.	
Teacher: Germs and probably his physical appearance, particularly when he wants to socialise and he has greasy grimy hands like most mechanics get. Can anyone think of anything else? Debbie?	Probing the issue.
Student: Whether or not he'll have to pay board.	
Teacher: Right, whether or not he'll have to pay board. That's an issue that they'll discuss if they decide that he can leave school. Remember the main thing they've got to decide is whether or not Johnny is allowed to leave school early to get his job and if he is allowed that will mean he'll miss out on his Junior certificate. Right. You seem to have a pretty good under-standing of the character of John, Mum, Dad and Liz. Who would like to play the role of John today?	Restating the problem to be role played.
Student: Me.	
Teacher: OK, Brett thanks for volunteering I think you'd make a good John. Who'd like to play the part of Mum? Thanks Debbie. Who'd like to play the part of Dad? Right Chris you can be Dad. Who'd like to play the part of the sister? Chris you'd make a good sister.	Selection of role players
Teacher: Let's prepare a space to act out this situation. Become aware of your character role. Take your places. Now this scene is in the family home. Now remember you're no longer representing yourselves, remember the type of character you are and what you want to say at this family gathering. Remember the action takes place in the lounge room. John is returning home from a day at work with Mr Brown with whom he is presently completing one week's work experience. Remember John, you are desperately seeking employment as a mechanic.	**Phase Three** Setting the stage and the line of action.

Script	Comments
Mr Brown has offered him an apprenticeship and the family must now decide what to do. For the remainder of the class you are going to act as observers. You must watch closely and listen carefully to what they're saying. Also think about how realistic their acting is and how realistic the things they say are. Also if you think of any solutions to the problem jot them down as well. OK, when you're ready, begin to role play the situation.	**Phase Four** Preparation of the observers. Deciding exactly what the observers will look for.
Role Play **Script:** John: Hi Mum. Hi Dad. Dad: Hi son. Mum: Where have you been? John: I've been at work. Mr Brown wanted to talk to me after work. Guess what? He offered me an apprenticeship. Mum: Oh! You should be at home studying. You've been late so many times this week. John: Yeah, but he wanted to give me an apprenticeship Mum. Liz: Ha! You an apprentice. Mum: You should be working towards getting your Junior. Dad: Listen dear, let him finish.	**Phase Five** Enactment of the dilemma. role Play runs uninterrupted in order to gain continuity.

Script	Comments
John: Yeah, school's boring Mum. I don't like it.	
Mum: Look if you don't get your Junior certificate. You've got no chance of anything - no employment.	
John: Yeah, so what, I like doing mechanics, it's good. There will always be a job there.	
Mum: Won't you get sick of it. What if you get sick of it? Then what are you going to do?	
John: I won't get sick of it.	
Mum: What if you do?	
John: I won't!	
Dad: Right son tell us more about what a mechanic does?	
John: Oh you know. You know how your car usually stuffs up. How many times has your car stuffed up Dad? We have to go out and fix it and put new parts in	
Dad: See, I don't know much about it as I'm no mechanic. I don't like to get my hands dirty.	
John: See that's why we'll have lots of work.	
Liz: Mum let him get a job because then we can get some money because he eats us out of house and home.	
Mum: It would be good to have a bit more money in the house. Why don't you be like your sister. She's got her Junior and she's in grade 12 now and she'll finish that at the end of the year? She'll be able to get a good job and earn lots of money.	
John: I will be earning lots of money after this year. I'll be getting a man's wage, Mum.	
Dad: John what's this Mr Brown like? What's he going on about?	

Script	
John: Oh he wants you to go down and see him sometime this week or next week and he'll just tell you about all the stuff about my job. Mum: We might go down one day next week. But we're only going to discuss it; no definite decisions yet! John: Please Mum, please say yes! Mum: We'll think about it.	

A Brief Critical Analysis of the Teaching Process of the Model.

I discovered, when using the role play strategy that role playing is not likely to be successful if the teacher tosses out a problem situation, persuades a few students to act it out and then conduct a discussion about the enactment. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 244). The most important points to remember when using this strategy is to select a real-life, 'relevant' topic to explore and to thoroughly prepare the participants. The topic chosen for the role play was very relevant to the students in Year ten (10) Citizenship Education class, as quite a few of them were weighing up the benefits of leaving school early to get a job. Also the preparation of students through warm up activities, setting the scene, selecting participants and preparing observers helps to dispel the many inhibitions that students can have about acting in front of a group of peers.

One problem area to be avoided is the selecting of students to participate in the role play, who will give 'an adult-oriented, socially acceptable' interpretation to the role. It is more important that students respond as teenagers rather than as adult clones. If students learn to express their own attitudes and beliefs then the follow-up discussions can become very relevant and meaningful for the students. (Shaftel 1967: 67). One of the most important phases in this strategy is phase seven, this is when after discussion and review the students have the opportunity to re-enact the situation. I thought initially that the students would become bored with this process and switch off. To my surprise the opposite occurred, the class became more interested in the development of the drama as each role play was enacted. The class observers saw themselves as directors of the action and were particularly keen to offer suggestions to the actors. The role play strategy is a 'comfortable' Teaching/Learning strategy to use in the classroom. It is both easy to understand and interpret as well as to implement. It has added variety to my teaching repertoire and in so doing has given the students an opportunity to become actively involved in exploring issues and dilemmas and acquiring skills. For some of the Citizenship education students this is the first time that the curriculum has actually come alive for them. Several of the students voluntarily commented on the benefits of the role play model.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Role Play Model

Syntax

As an English, Social Science teacher, I saw that this model had enormous possibilities for implementation. As I was constantly dealing with problems and dilemmas as they occurred in the content of the lessons (eg in novels, poetry, the media), role play was useful to further explore the issues involved. The main function of the teacher in introducing role play to a class is to sensitise the group to the problem and create a climate of acceptance of feelings, values, attitudes and individual differences, so that all students feel that all views, feelings and behaviours will be accepted without retribution. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 246). If students become comfortable with using this strategy not only democratic **principles are reinforced** (eg all have the right to offer an opinion and all have the right to participate). Shaftel maintains that introducing students to a problem through reading about a dilemma enables students to disassociate themselves from the

problem enough to face it for what it is. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 246) Perhaps the greatest benefit of the role play model is that it educates to responsibility and accountability, as well as the development of skills in communication, critical thinking and strategies in conflict resolution, problem solving and behaviour modification.

The Social System

If this model is to be used successfully then the teacher must assume the role of organiser (viz. selecting problem situations, choosing actors). However, the students retain the responsibility for the development of the role play. The model encourages students to freely and honestly express their ideas and feelings. In a subject like Citizenship Education where the content centres around controversial issues, role play provides the outlet for students to freely express their ideas and preferences. The most difficult thing for the teacher to do is to refrain from value judgements on what is being expressed. (Joyce and Weil 1986: 251).

Principles of Reaction

In order not to stifle creativity it is important that teachers offer non-evaluative comments. This means that the role of the observer becomes all important. When a student in a role play situation is offering an extremely racist point of view a role observer should point this out in the follow-up discussions, so that evaluative comments can come from peers and not the teacher. This inevitably has more impact upon the student who has made the initial statement.

Support System

The major curriculum tool for this particular strategy is the problem solving situation. Subject areas and especially films, novels and short stories provide excellent sources for problem situations. It is important that the problem involves a number of characters who face a dilemma in which a choice must be made and/or action taken.

Application

The role play model carries with it an appealing set of activities. Often students find that the action and the acting are so absorbing that they forget the role play itself is a vehicle for developing the content of the lesson.

Instructional and Nurturant Effects

Through the actual role play situation and the feedback from role observers students can analyse their own personal values and behaviour. They are also placed in a position where they must solve interpersonal problems and develop empathy toward others and

develop a greater awareness of their feelings and beliefs. Most importantly, however, students who have become all too complacent, or have been conditioned by society's values, can gain enormous satisfaction from actually being able to express their own ideas without fear, or repercussion.

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